

At The Foot of The Diamond Cliffs

Part 1: "傅抱石日记，子时，庚辰年二月初六" (Fu Baoshi's Diary, Midnight, February 6th, Year of the Metal Dragon)

Catherine

Brush poised, ink weaves into paper,
strokes bending like wind over stone.

Mountains rise in pools of ebony,
sky leaning languidly against earth.

Mist—murmuring, shifting,
tugging incessantly at memory's
loose threads.

Stygian rivers spill from my brush,
and I work as if time is slipping through my fingers,
as if the Diamond Cliffs might recede
if I do not pin them to the page.

These cliffs have swallowed centuries—
even as time gnaws at their bones,
even as I press them into permanence.

But the World is ravenous.
A great, gaping maw,
devouring the voices of the lost,
englutting names whole,
grinding memory to dust between its teeth.
It feasts on silence, quaffs absence,
leaving only the hollowed carcass of history behind.

And so I listen. I paint. I remember.

Because someone must.

The rivers will keep their tongues.

The mountains will hold their names.

But the women—

The women will dissipate like fog.

Part 2: "我的日记，未时，癸卯年三月初十" (My Diary, Afternoon, March 10th, Year of the Water Rabbit)

Their names have unravelled,

unthreaded from history's loom.

Only the winds, only the mountains

shield them, folded into their fissures,

sequestered in the hollows of stone.

We have forgotten the names of the mountains,

my people, the more we prostrated

before the gods of gold and graves,

the city's insatiable hunger.

Gods with jaguar eyes, their pupils inkwells,

bleeding into the air, staining our lungs—

black lace on medical glass,

Rorschach ghosts waiting for diagnosis.

what do you see?

my Death, certainly.

but still no names.

Not of the women before me,

nor the rivers and ridgelines,
nor the marrow-deep promises
my ancestors bartered for exile.

Land traded for land.
Roots severed for wind.

I implore the past, but it does not answer.
I pray to the Delphic Elder, but it does not answer.

what was her name?
detachment.
where did she come from?
silence.

Then that must be it—
she came from air.
From wind.
From earth, stilling to quiet.

Yet, in the alpenglow hush,
when light stretches thin over water,
when no one is near to silence the past,
when I see the mountains
breaking the sky wide open,
I hear them.

The women in my blood,
the ones who remember.

Their names roll through the valleys,
compress against the cliffs,
whisper into my ear—
as if waiting to be written.